

Message Text

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47

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15 /069 W
----- 010223

R 051508Z NOV 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6204
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL BELFAST

UNCLAS LONDON 16931

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK(NI)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: SECRETARY REES ANNOUNCES PRISON REFORMS

1. ADDRESSING HOUSE OF COMMONS ON AMENDMENT TO NI EMERGENCY PROVISIONS ACT WHICH ADDS ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE (UVF), A PROTESTANT PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATION, TO LIST OF PROSCRIBED ORGANIZATIONS, NI SECRETARY REES ANNOUNCED GOVERNMENT PLANS FOR PRISON REFORMS. HE ALSO STRESSED FACT THAT GOVERNMENT HAD NO INTENTION OF DECLARING ANARCHY FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS IN FUTURE. ASSERTING THAT THOSE WHO LABORED UNDER THIS MISAPPREHENSION WILL BE BITTERLY DISAPPOINTED. AMENDMENT WAS APPROVED OVERWHELMINGLY.

2. ON PRISON REFORM, REES SAID GOVERNMENT WILL PHASE OUT "SPECIAL CATEGORY" STATUS FOR THOSE CONVICTED OF POLITICAL CRIMES, BEGINNING MARCH 1, 1975 (SUCH CONVICTS ARE NOW HELD IN BARRACKS COMPOUNDS RATHER THAN CELL BLOCKS AND ENJOY PRIVILEGES DENIED COMMON PRISONERS). ALL PERSONS CONVICTED AFTER THAT DATE WILL BE HELD IN REGULAR PRISONS WITHOUT SPECIAL PRIVILEGES. AS NI PRISON SYSTEM IS HEAVILY OVERCROWDED AND HAS NO PAROLE SYSTEM, GOVERNMENT WILL BEGIN RELEASING THOSE (OTHER THAN LIFE PRISONERS) WHO HAVE SERVED HALF THEIR SENTENCES,

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THUS FREEING SPACE FOR NEW CONVICTS (GOVERNMENT IS ALSO

PROCEEDING WITH PRISON CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM). PRISONERS RELEASED EARLY WOULD HAVE TO SERVE BALANCE OF ORIGINAL SENTENCE IF SUBSEQUENTLY CONVICTED OF ANOTHER CRIME.

3. CONCERNING DETENTION, REES REAFFIRMED HIS OBJECTIVE OF ENDING THIS PRACTICE AND GOVERNMENT'S LONGER TERM AIM OF "PLANNED, ORDERLY AND PROGRESSIVE REDUCTION" OF ARMY UNITS IN NI AS SECURITY SITUATION NORMALIZES.

4. COMMENT: ENTIRE PROGRAM ANNOUNCED BY REES MUST BE VIEWED AS PROVIDING FURTHER INCENTIVE FOR PEACE IN NI AS WELL AS DISINCENTIVES FOR MEN OF VIOLENCE. PRISON REFORMS, WHICH WERE WELL RECEIVED BY COMMONS, GO A LONG WAY TOWARD IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS OF GARDINER COMMISSION REPORT. INITIAL REACTION FROM PROTESTANT LEADERS WAS FAVORABLE. UNIONIST PARLIAMENTARY LEADER JAMES MOLYNEAUX SUGGESTED REES HAD GONE LONG WAY TOWARD MEETING REQUESTS OF PROTESTANTS AND ENDORSED TERMINATION OF SPECIAL CATEGORY STATUS AND REMISSION PLAN. JOHN HUME (SDLP DEPUTY LEADER), HOWEVER, TOLD BELFAST PRINCIPAL OFFICER (BOTH WERE AT PARLIAMENT) THAT REES' REMISSION PROGRAM AMOUNTED TO "HALF AMNESTY."

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PENAL REFORM, PENAL INSTITUTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 NOV 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975LONDON16931
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750384-0900
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751173/aaaacmw1.tel
Line Count: 85
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 26 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <26 SEP 2003 by chicheje>; APPROVED <18 FEB 2004 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NORTHERN IRELAND: SECRETARY REES ANNOUNCES PRI- SON REFORMS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK, (REES, MERLYN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006